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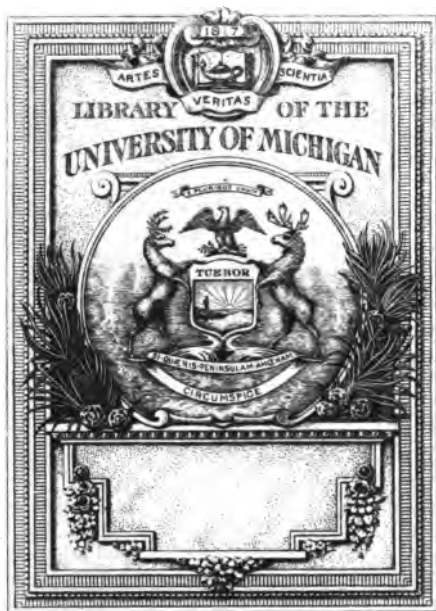
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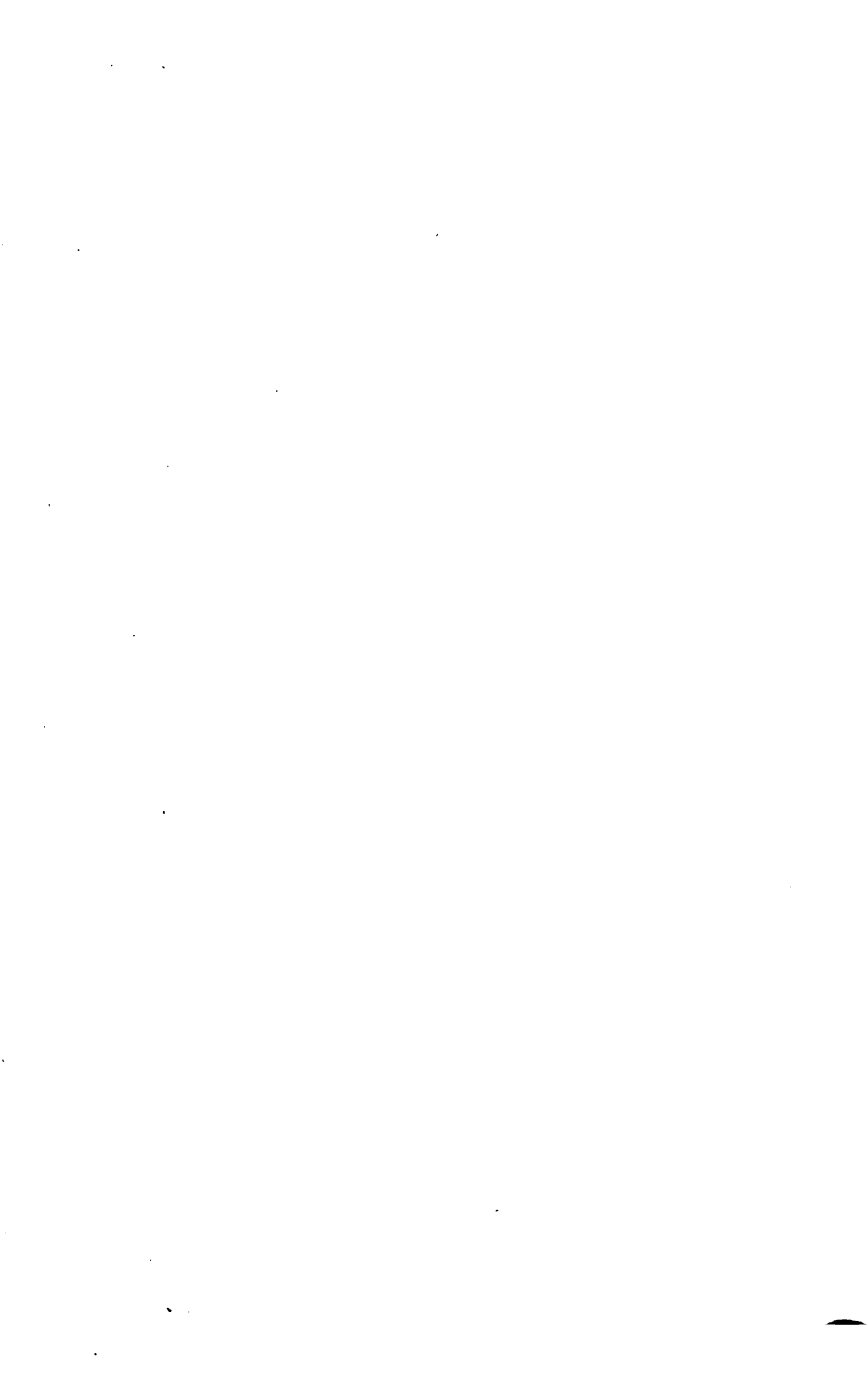
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THE WORLD'S BEST PLAYS
BY CELEBRATED EUROPEAN AUTHORS

BARRETT H. CLARK

GENERAL EDITOR

**Jean-Marie: a Play in One
Act: by André Theuriet:
Translated by Barrett H.
Clark**

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ANDRÉ THEURIET.

Theuriet is better known as a novelist, and it is perhaps for that reason that this little play possesses a certain charm which might be lacking in a more abrupt and "dramatic" handling of the same theme.

"Jean-Marie", first produced in Paris at the Odéon (1871), with Sarah Bernhardt as Thérèse, has held the stage from the first.

The simplest of settings and costumes are required.

JEAN-MARIE.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

THÉRÈSE
JEAN-MARIE
JOËL

SCENE:—*A small cottage by the Sea, in Brittany.*

TIME:—*The present (1871).*

JEAN-MARIE.

SCENE:—*Interior of a BRETON farm-house. To the right, down-stage, is a deep and high fireplace; near this is an old chair. Half-way up-stage on the same side is a door leading into the next room. To the left is an old cupboard. Down-stage, are a table, a leather chair, and a few stools. In the upper right-hand corner of the room is a window looking out on the sea-cliff. Center is an arched doorway, through which land and sea can be observed.*

As the curtain rises THÉRÈSE *is standing by the open window, busied with flax and a spindle. She sings softly as she works:*

THÉRÈSE. (*Singing*)

“The brig sailed past out over the sea
With its sails and masts so high;
The Saint Azénor flew like a bird
And a thousand stars filled the sky.”

(*She suddenly breaks off and looks out through the door*) The seagulls are crying so mournfully this evening! There on the beach their cries mingle with the moan of the ocean: I never hear them without thinking of this old, old ballad. (*She sits down and sings again*)

“The captain brave was nearly dead,
Thru billows did he roam;

But the stout ship took him on and on
Till it brought him to port—and home!”

(*Once again interrupting herself*) And he never left his port again or his home, the singer who wrote that. I too have prayed to the saints and the Holy Virgin; in vain I have lighted candles—the Saints are deaf to me, and the sea never gives back the sailors it has taken—(*She lets her spindle fall, and remains in a pensive attitude*)

(*Enter JOËL at the back.*)

JOËL. (*Laying a packet on a stool*) Good-day, wife!

THÉRÈSE. (*Surprised*) Joël! (*She quickly dries a tear and rises*)

JOËL. You didn't expect me before night—but I've done some good strokes of business. This time I didn't stay to drink with my friends, but came home at once with a good sackful of money.

THÉRÈSE. (*Smiling*) Good. I am sure your own wine will taste better. Here is something to keep you from regretting the inn—(*She goes to the cupboard and brings a bottle and a glass, and lays them on the table before JOËL*)

JOËL. Thanks, thanks, Thérèse. (*He drinks*) Splendid! (*He looks at THÉRÈSE, who has just picked up her distaff*) Why, you don't seem at all anxious? I've come from the town—and on a market-day—and there you sit, not at all interested. You don't even ask if the fair was pretty, or don't you care about hearing the news?

THÉRÈSE. (*Shaking her head as if to dispel a thought*) I am sorry! Forgive me.

JOËL. You're so absent-minded—you seem to be dreaming—always up in the clouds. What are you thinking of?

THÉRÈSE. (*Turning to JOËL, after taking the*

bottle and glass back to the cupboard) Now, Joël, I'll be glad to hear about everything. Did you sell your grain?

JOËL. I should think I did! You never saw so many people in the market in all your life. Every minute there came more cattle and more people. The howling mob overflowed into the street. Such busy streets and full inns and houses! (*He goes to get the package on the stool where he left it on entering*) I have your share on what I sold, and see what I've brought you! (*He opens the package and shows her silks of various bright colors*) I don't know much about these things, but tell me, do you like them? The people who sold them told me that they came from far-off countries: Japan, I think they said, and China. Think of the poor sailors——

THÉRÈSE. (*Trembling*) The sailors!

JOËL. (*Disappointed*) Well, you don't say a word? I thought you'd be—I *am* stupid! Aren't they pretty?

THÉRÈSE. They're too pretty! You are so good, Joël—too good for me!

JOËL. (*Rising*) Too good? Saints in Heaven, I'd like to cover you with silks and jewels! But whatever I do, you still look pale and troubled. Why, your eyes are filled with tears—and your cheek is wet. You've been crying! How often you've nearly driven me mad. I thought it was your mother's death and I said, she'll get over it! Other people aren't always mourning; yours never stops.

THÉRÈSE. I want to forget these sad things. Now—see? I'm laughing. (*She tries to smile but bursts into tears*)

JOËL. (*Bitterly*) There you are, worse than before. Tell me, what is troubling you? Would you like some new furniture for the house? More cows? More clothes? Tell me what you'd like, and I'll get it for you——

THÉRÈSE. Everything you do for me only makes it worse. The more you do the more guilty I feel, Joël!

JOËL. (*Surprised*) Guilty? Why, Thérèse, what——?

THÉRÈSE. I am keeping an awful secret. Often I've blamed myself—I've thought it a mortal sin to have hidden it from you——

JOËL. What do you mean? A secret? If it has anything to do with me, why haven't you spoken about it before?

THÉRÈSE. The very day I promised to become your wife, Joël, I wanted to tell you everything, but my mother was afraid and told me to keep the secret from you. It was wrong of me—but now I must tell you. Some years ago, there was a young fisherman, who lived on the road leading to the "Trois Etangs", in Kerlaz, and he was called Jean-Marie. We knew each other and played together as children. After a time we were engaged. Jean-Marie was very poor and I had no dowry—when he was twenty he became a sailor: he wanted, he said, to turn his copper sous into gold-pieces, so that we should be able to live in good style. He sailed away in the "Roi-Gralon", and started for Japan. That's a great way off, but love is strong, and when I thought of him he didn't seem so far. A year passed, then two—I was waiting for him—then I heard a report about him: the ship had been wrecked away off somewhere. Then I heard nothing more of Jean-Marie—that was all!

JOËL. Who knows? Sometimes lost sailors return?

THÉRÈSE. I tried by every means to find out. I prayed, then asked questions of every returning sailor; Heaven was deaf, and I learned nothing. I would have waited for him always if I hadn't been sure he was dead—(*She stops for a moment. JOËL ill-pleased, listens attentively; then she resumes,*

speaking to herself) and yet—I always think of him—do what I will, I can't help it. In winter, when I hear the waves moaning on the shore, I think I hear his voice; when the ships come into the harbor, I always ask myself: "What if he weren't dead?" (JOËL *sits down, uncertain what to do*) I'm so sorry! I beg your pardon! It's not right!

JOËL. Not right? Oh, no—only I see how mistaken I was. Now I understand why you have cried so often—I see everything now! And I thought you would forget your sorrow if I brought these—these toys! (*He picks up the silks, etc., and folds them quickly*) Sometimes, in the evening, as I counted up my money, I used to think that we could buy some fine mirrors for the house, or some clothes' chests; and Thérèse would smile. Then I was full of hope, but now I see—! You'll never be cured, and I can't struggle against the thought! (*He throws the silks on the floor and rises*) Ah, my old white hairs! If only I were young again, I'd make you forget—now it's too late. I'm ugly, I'm sad, and I'm old. If I were twenty once again—

THÉRÈSE. My dear Joël, I have made you suffer for a long time; but now I want to make you happy: I shall be a good and faithful wife to you. You were going to live in this house that my father built, but there are too many sad memories here. Take me away—to your home, behind the Black Hills, into the oak forests—where I can't see the harbor or the sea.

JOËL. Would you leave your home, your fields, all this dear country—?

THÉRÈSE. Please take me away!

JOËL. But it means exile, and you can't leave without regrets.

THÉRÈSE. You left your home to come here.

JOËL. Yes—sometimes I do regret it.

THÉRÈSE. Then let us go there.

JOËL. Thank you, Thérèse, but these things can't

be decided at once. I can't think just now—(*He presses his hand to his forehead*) My old head is weak, I'll take a walk in the cool air, and then tell you what I think. I'll be back in time for supper. (*He takes her hand, then goes out, right*)

THÉRÈSE. (*Going to the window and arranging her spindle*) Yes, it will be better; I must forget you, Jean-Marie! How hot it is! (*She opens the window*) The sea looks asleep—I hear the moaning of the gulls! There's a storm in the air. Joël is so good! It would be a sin to give him my hand and not my soul. I must make his home happy, and sing—(*She sighs*) But I know only sad songs. (*A pause, then she sings softly:*)

“The Captain brave was nearly dead,
Thru th' billows did he roam,
But the stout ship took him on and on
Till it brought him to port—and home!”

He went to the castle and knocked on the gate
Three times he knocked and ”——

(*She stops suddenly*) Oh, I can't forget him!

(*JEAN-MARIE appears at the back. He stops short on the threshold to look at THÉRÈSE. Suddenly the young woman turns around and screams.*)

JEAN-MARIE. Yes, it's I, Thérèse! My dearest, it's I.

THÉRÈSE. (*Trembling*) Jean-Marie!

JEAN-MARIE. (*Darting toward her*) At last! I see you, I can touch you, hear your voice!—I wanted to surprise you—not let you know a thing about it. I left the ship as soon as I could, took the short path through the fields—how beautiful they were! When I saw your little red roof through the leaves, I could hardly stand up! (*He stops and*

looks intently at THÉRÈSE) But—There!—You're so pale! Why don't you look at me? Your hands are trembling? Are you afraid?

THÉRÈSE. (*Feebly*) At first I thought it was your ghost standing there—We waited so long for you—and cried——!

JEAN-MARIE. I too thought I should never come back—it was only a miracle that saved me. We were returning from China; we couldn't see land, but we knew it was near. The night came on, and the sky was threatening; the next day there was a thick fog—thinking we were still some distance from land, we ran on to a shoal and the ship was soon wrecked. I managed to save myself, with three other sailors. Our little boat tossed about for a whole day, then the wind sent us to a desert island, where for months we almost starved. But one night we saw a sail on the horizon—It was life, salvation! God, how my heart beat when the ship answered our signal of distress! We were taken on board—the ship was on its way back to the Orient—I was one of the crew and I didn't want to come back home empty-handed. I said to myself: "It will be for her!" And I worked and I made some money. I was happy too, when I left—and here I am. How have you been meantime? Happy? Calm? Your fields look prosperous—(*He smiles*) Now your father can't object to me for a son-in-law?

THÉRÈSE. My father is dead.

JEAN-MARIE. (*Taking off his cap*) So soon? He seemed so young and strong! And your mother, old Annaïc?

THÉRÈSE. Last winter we buried her——

JEAN-MARIE. Dead! Both dead! And I was so far away! And you were here alone to mourn them, without help, without friends! We were not together, Thérèse! Now I'm home, and I shan't go away again—my Thérèse, my love! Come—let me hold you!

THÉRÈSE. (*Stepping back in terror*) No, no. You must go away.

JEAN-MARIE. (*Incredulously*) You're trying to test me? Aren't you? Why don't you say something? (*He seizes her hand and looks intently at her*) You—you aren't married, are you?

THÉRÈSE. Two years ago this coming Christmas, I married old Joël.

JEAN-MARIE. (*Leaning on the table*) Married! Saints in Heaven!

THÉRÈSE. (*Supplicating him*) Forgive me!

JEAN-MARIE. The wife of old Joël!

THÉRÈSE. Listen to me!

JEAN-MARIE. (*Quickly rising*) Often we sailors talked together, at night, after the work was done, about our dear ones at home; I talked about my sweetheart, who was waiting for me. The sailors made fun of me, and told me she was perhaps thinking of someone else, and had forgotten me, but I answered: "No, Thérèse will wait for me! She will not forget!" When I went to my berth the thousands of stars somehow comforted me. But *you*—you thought that a real husband was better than a possible one, a poor boy on the ocean. The stars lied to me! Why didn't I drown when I might have? I should have died without learning of this—Thérèse has sold herself, body and soul!

THÉRÈSE. Listen to me!

JEAN-MARIE. (*Casting her aside*) No, no, I am suffering too much! Good-by, I must go away.

THÉRÈSE. (*Intercepting him as he goes to the door*) Not without hearing me! Stay here! If the past means anything to you, as it does to me, you must pity me! You have no idea what tortures I've suffered. Just think my parents are dead; I had to work so hard, spinning; I had to support my poor mother through her sickness; we had to sell nearly everything; the bailiffs came—how I wanted you—I was so heart-sick, Jean-Marie! I prayed and wept

for you—but your ship was far away at the other end of the world, and our troubles and sorrows were so great I could not bear the burden. Joël, of Loc-Ronan, knew of our misery and came one evening to see us—he had known my father ever since they were children together. He offered to help, and my mother accepted. Then he came often to see us. One day we were alone together, and he took my hand in his: “Your mother hasn’t much longer to live,” he said, “give me your heart, if you love her and want to help her.” But my heart was ’way off on the ocean, and I answered him only with sobs. Then I heard of your shipwreck. All hope was gone. Every day Joël came and repeated his offer. My mother said nothing, she only looked at me, but her look was a prayer. I so pitied her—and I said, Yes—I thought I was going to die! (*A pause. JEAN-MARIE, who sits by the table, hides his head in his hands*)

JEAN-MARIE. What have we done to be punished like this? Heaven should have helped us. We loved each other so! I remember how we sat together under the tree—your hand in mine——!

THÉRÈSE. (*In an undertone*) We mustn’t think of that!

JEAN-MARIE. (*After a moment’s hesitation*) But—does *he* make you happy? If I knew that I shouldn’t suffer so much.

THÉRÈSE. (*Aside*) I must lie!—Joël is very good to me—my life is easy—our home is peaceful——

JEAN-MARIE. Just one word more: forgive me if what I said to you a few moments ago, hurt you! I must not interfere with you. I ask only one thing, Thérèse: let me live somewhere near you, where I can sometimes see your roof, in the distance, where I can perhaps walk past the house and——

THÉRÈSE. No, you must not stay—you must go at once!

JEAN-MARIE. Let me live alone in some quiet corner—no one need know. You will never see me!

THÉRÈSE. No, no!

JEAN-MARIE. I swear by the Holy Virgin I shall never say or do a thing you need fear. I shall be strong! Would you think me capable of—? (THÉRÈSE *sadly bows her head*) Then what are you afraid of?

THÉRÈSE. I am afraid of myself!

JEAN-MARIE. (*Darting toward her and taking her hands*) Then you still love me! Don't deny it! You can't forget all we've meant to each other. Our love is not the kind that can be forgotten; nothing can break it—You love me!

THÉRÈSE. (*Overcome by her feelings*) Jean-Marie!

JEAN-MARIE. You believed that false report of my death. They took advantage of you, and your promise therefore was no promise. He took you by surprise, and you had no right to consent! Your heart is mine, your love is mine alone!

THÉRÈSE. Joël is my husband, and my heart is his—

JEAN-MARIE. But listen to me: the Dutch schooner that brought me here sails to-night. It is full of emigrants, poor people like ourselves. It's going far off to a better country. Come—there is no one here—it will soon be so dark that no one can see us—You love me!—Quick, give me your hand—come with me!

THÉRÈSE. (*Breaking from him*) What are you asking me to do?

JEAN-MARIE. Let us go away together!

THÉRÈSE. Leave me—no!

JEAN-MARIE. But what can keep you here? What can you hope for? This place is lonely—you are young. You can't deny our love. Are you willing to live without love, without family, without hope?

THÉRÈSE. Jean! You mustn't say those things to me!

JEAN-MARIE. (*Seizing her hand again*) Come! Let us make a new home—across the ocean! Come! I know of a wonderful island in the Antilles. There we can begin our life and be happy by ourselves. We can have our own farm. Our love there—(*He drags her toward the door at the back*)

THÉRÈSE. (*Terrified*) Wait! Please—I—I'm dizzy!

JEAN-MARIE. Wait?! We haven't time! Why should we wait? Joël will be here soon——

THÉRÈSE. (*Freeing herself and running to the opposite side of the stage*) Joël! I must stay! Go now! I can't go with you. I—I don't want to! Think of it: he's an old man, and I'm his only hope, his only joy in life. He left his own farm to come here and be with me. Think, too, he saved us when we were dying of hunger and cold. Think: I swore to be his faithful wife. What if he returned to-night and found the house deserted! It would be treason—he might even die! He would always stand between us and our happiness!

JEAN-MARIE. (*Bitterly*) And I thought you loved me!

THÉRÈSE. Nothing can affect the love I feel for you, nothing ever did: the report of your death made no difference in that! If I did what you ask me to do, I should die of shame! I might even end by hating you! No, my dearest, we must part—now! (*She kneels*) I beg you. Let me keep my love for you as pure as when we stood together and listened to the Angelus. Leave me now. We were never intended to be so happy. Go, and let me love you still!

JEAN-MARIE. (*Taking her in his arms and raising her to her feet*) Good-by, then.

THÉRÈSE. I want to ask you to make one final

sacrifice : no one here knows that you have returned ?

JEAN-MARIE. No one.

THÉRÈSE. And the Dutch schooner leaves to-night ? (JEAN-MARIE *nods*) Well, go aboard her again—no one need ever know you have been here. Let everyone think you dead—as you are dead to me.

JEAN-MARIE. I shall leave to-night.

THÉRÈSE. God watch over you ; let him grant you a safe voyage—my thoughts will go with you. (*She supports herself on the table. A pause*)

JEAN-MARIE. (*At the door*) Thérèse ! (*She turns quickly to him*) Thérèse—let me kiss you—for the last time. That will give me strength.

THÉRÈSE. (*Feebly*) No ! (*With greater strength*) No !

JEAN-MARIE. Then—good-by ! For the last time. (*He goes slowly out and disappears. THÉRÈSE stands motionless, leaning on the table. After a few moments, JOËL comes in, left. He shows surprise*)

JOËL. Alone ?

THÉRÈSE. (*Trembling*) Yes.

JOËL. I thought I heard voices ?

THÉRÈSE. A traveler it was, who had lost his way. A sailor—he was tired——

JOËL. Did you ask him to sit down and rest ?

THÉRÈSE. Yes.

JOËL. He must have told you something exciting—I could hear you——

THÉRÈSE. (*After a moment of silence*) He was once a sailor on the “Roi-Gralon”—he was on board when it was wrecked. I was asking him about—Jean-Marie——

JOËL. (*Going to her*) Well—— ?

THÉRÈSE. He will never come back. (*She sits down. JOËL takes her hands*)

CURTAIN.

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BARRETT H. CLARK

General Editor



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